

Conflict in Southern Thailand: Historical Perspectives

Ahmad Bashawir Abdul Ghani & Chumphon Kaewsom
UUM College of Law, Government and International Studies
Universiti Utara Malaysia
06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah
bashawir@uum.edu.my

Abstract: In the southern border provinces of Thailand, especially Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, there are two religious groups of people, Thai Muslims and Buddhists. However, the percentage of Thai Muslims is higher than Thai Buddhists. The historical differences of race, culture and religion may have contributed to the ethnic conflict between the state and Thai Muslims for decades. The lack of knowledge in relation to understanding Muslims religious way of life, Muslims were coerced directly or indirectly to act as Thai Buddhists by the Thai government. This is found to be one of the biggest conundrum and pressing issues Thai governments should address and find an amicable solution urgently. Additionally, it is essential to note that historical perspectives of Pattani state is completely different from both side, this can lead to potentially political conflict in this area. Therefore, the government should rewrite a new paradigm by cooperating with all groups of people involve this conflict. If the majority of people could accept the recognition of diversity and promote unity, *'eventually'* this will result *'in peaceful coexistence'*.

Keywords: Conflict, Historical perspectives, Thailand

Historical evidence back to Sukhothai era, showed that the Pattani State has had a long relationship with the Thai state. Before the political and government reform during the reign of Rama V, The Pattani State were given autonomy from Thai state. During Sukhothai era, in the Silajaruk (engraved stone) evidence displayed that from Nakhon Sri Thammarat down to Malay peninsula, Malaka and Singapore were all territories of the Thai state since King Ramkamhang. Pattani, aside from having to send golden and silver flowers three years per time to the Thai state was basically self-governed. When Ayutthaya was weak or during transitions of Kings, Pattani had always struggled for high autonomy (Burutphat, 1976; Nakmaung, 1995). Finally, Pattani was under the rulings of Ayutthaya until Burma claim of sovereignty over Ayutthaya in 1767. Then, Pattani became independent again until the era of Thonburi.

Resistance from central controls and the struggle for independence continued into the Ratanakosin era. It was an important turning point for Pattani State during King Rama I era, when Pattani ruler tried to stage a rebellion for independence from the Thai state. In 1808 A.D., the war between Patani and Siam was begun during an era of the first King Jakri Dynasty. The final outcome of this war, Siam overcome and governed Patani. After that, Patani was separated into seven cities such as Patani, Yala, Yaring, Ra-ngae, Ra-man, Sai-buri and Nong-jick. Afterwards, Pattani state was annexed into the Kingdom of Thailand and also was reformed and reorganized by King Rama V in 1902. After widespread political and government reform during Rama V, the central government lost control of the seven cities (Salae, 2004; Wongted, 2004; Croisant, 2007). Then, the seven former administrative of Pattani were abolished and replaced by Monthon Pattani.

In a period of King Rama VI, he acknowledged that these border regions were distinct from other regions and it was desired to treat with special care. In order to eliminate the critical problem in the south of Thailand, the public policies were applied and guided by King Rama VI. For instance, fair tax policies and positive attitudes from official state in term of understanding the diverse cultures. Additionally, official state should work honestly and treat local people equally (al-Fatani, 1994).

In 1909, Thai and British governments signed the contract “The Anglo-Thai Treaty” 1909 which is the line of demarcation between British, Malaya and Thailand. Subsequently, Pattani State was completely annexed as a part of Thailand as result of this contract. Another effect of this situation is that the last ruler of Pattani State, Tengku Abdul Kadir Kamarudin, lost the political power and began against Thai government. Then, he was arrested and accused of disobedience to Thai government. After that, he was imprisoned for 10 years in Pitsanulok, northern province of Thailand. Afterwards, he was released by supporting from Sir Frank Swettenham, Governor General of Singapore, who made an attempt to negotiate with Thai government. Eventually, Tengku Abdul Kadir Kamarudin was granted royal amnesty on the condition that not participates in any case of political activities. In 1915, He was released in 1905 A.D. and then he had been refugees in Kelantan. In 1923 A.D. he was involved in a conspiracy and death in 1933 A.D. After that, the last son of Tengku Abdul Kadir (Tengku Mahmud Mahyideen) followed the intention of separating Pattani (Pitsuwan, 1985).

In order to emancipate Pattani state, Tengku Mahmud Mahyideen also made a good political relationship with some of religious leaders in southern Thailand. Meanwhile, the political concept of independent Pattani state form Tengku Mahmud Mahyideen was spread out through the Muslim world. It is generally accepted that the relationship between Muslims in Pattani and Kelantan in northern state of Malaysia had been well established as well as the relationship with royal families since Islam has been spread out in this region (Jory, 2007).

The state of Pattani was lost political power and autonomy since 1902 A.D. However, Islam had been supported by King of Siam. In 1901 A.D., the king of Siam decreed

Islamic Law about family life and safeguarding the heritage interests of Malay heritage asset in Pattani state has drawn attention to the fact the minority of Malay was care and considered than other groups in the reign of King Rama VI (Vella, (1976).

In 1932, constitutional regime was performed in preference to the sovereignty. Most of Muslim and the religious leaders in Pattani including Tengku Mahmud Mahyideen believed that new political development would be given the opportunity for political right in relation to independent state, religion, culture and language (Phanomyong, 1974). However, the majority of Islamic resident in Pattani were so discontented and dissatisfied upon the political failure. It is clear that the parliament no power and was under control of a few influential groups, particularly the military elites due to the fact that the military group were represented as administrative representation.

After the political reform in 1932 A.D., central and local governments from central were instead of the ruler in Pattani state. Then it was separated into three provinces that are Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. The public policies of General P. Pibulsongkram was a major cause of conflicts between the state and Muslim people in this region (von Feigenblatt, 2009). These policies were based on nationalism ideologies, which aimed to assimilate all the people in this region to become “Thai”, including even the Muslim population. Islamic people felt bitter resentment towards the state; as a result, this nationalism concept trended to abolish Muslim people and has a significant effect on religious teaching and livelihood. For example, in 1941 A.D. there was restriction about Buddha images were put in all public schools. Traditional dress of Muslims, Malay language and Islamic names were not allowed to use. If not followed, public services were not provided (Fraser, 1966). All of these action have had great affects on the hearts and minds of the Muslim resident in the south of Thailand. Muslim people in southern border were in a painful dilemma about fighting for independent of Pattani state for protecting religious and cultural identity or following the nationalist state.

An important milestone in 1947 A.D., seven requirements of independent were proposed to Thai Government by Haji Sulong bin Abdul Kadir. First, Muslim people have authority to govern and the government was elected by people who were born in Pattani, Naratiwas, Yala and Satul. Second, the percentage of Muslim government is eighty percent. Third, the official languages were Malay and Siamese. Fourth, Malay language has to be used in the primary schools. Fifth, Muslim law and court were used by Muslim people. Sixth, All of revenue and income derived from these four districts were spent in these area. Seventh, Muslim can participate in all political activities. According to this requirement, Haji Sulong bin Abdul Kadir was charged for rebellion and arrested three years imprisonment. After penalty, he was killed at Songkhla in Thailand. This may be a major cause of the terrorist movement in Thailand (Khunthongpet, 2005). Another important event is the Dusongyo Rebel in 1948, there was a clash between the police and people. These incidents are evidences of deep bitterness of Muslim people in the South of Thailand.

According to nationalism regulation, tension, political conflict and violence was escalating in the south of Thailand (Horstmann, 2008). Afterward, the assimilation of socialized policy in term of Thai culture was applied during Sarit Thanarat government,

especially academic education in primary school. The ministry of education applied the regulations to control Islamic school in southern Thailand. For example, Pondok schools were transformed into private schools. In addition, Malay language was cancelled and Thai language was applied in primary school and it is compulsory for all students to study Thai. Furthermore, academic book and document had to be proved by ministry of education otherwise it would be illegal (Pitiyanuwat, 2005). After that, Thai government support and evacuate Thai people from northeastern provinces of Thailand to settle in southern Thailand in order to make the equal population between Thai and Malay in this region while Muslims people in this area was ignored.

Subsequently, during Thanom Kittikhachon government, the nationalism policy was still applied. Muslims in southern border provinces of Thailand were likely believed that they were contributed like the second class citizens. At that moment, it is generally accepted that illegal punishments and killing naive people were not illegal (Rahimmula, 2004). Muslim peoples no alternative way to fight over political system; thus, separatist and terrorist movements had been started since the end of The World War II.

In 1978 A.D., Thai government promulgated the national policy about political stability in the three southern provinces, this policy play attention with special care for Muslim people more than people in other regions. Afterward, the center for directing Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC) and Mixed Commanding Unit between Civilians, Police and Military Officials number 43 (CPM 43), in 1981 A.D were established to address the communism; consequently. this organization played an important role in better between the state and the local people in this area (McCargo, 2006).

The cause of conflict problem in southern Thailand rely up on several factors, such as ethnic discrimination, racial segregation, economic development, political inequality and geography Professor Horowitz the experts on the ethnic conflict at Duke University proposed that, economic development might be contributed the separatist movement in this area. It is widely accepted that some of Muslim group were treated unfair in term of economic and political system this can lead to ethnic discrimination (Horowitz, 2001). Eventually, the separatist movement desire to fight for the freedom.

Associate Professor Monica Toft, the expert of security from Harvard University, indicated that the main cause of conflict problem might be in relation to ethic integration in the same area (Toft, 2003). Ted Gurr of academic study, who studies ethnic conflict of minority group, indicated that politically different perspective in the past and present could motivate the separatist movements. In addition, the first main point of separatist movements is a strong feeling of ethnic and religious identity. Secondly, the oppression from the government could motivate the ethnic group. Third, the inability Muslim group of to do political activities. Finally, political situation uncertainties such as the change in government, changing the political system and political crisis (Gurr, 2000).

In addition, there is a group that was against the state rule. The objective of this group did not intend to separate the land but they want to fight for the actions on government officials. They have strong feeling that a system of justice was unfair because of racial prejudice and loss of identity in Malayu Pattani. There are some group of people who had the benefit from this political situation; for example, a group of illegal business, especially drug trafficking and the smuggling contraband in this area. While, some government officials were getting directly or indirectly the benefit of the state budget in term of corruption and conflict of interest (Dorairajoo, 2004; Askew, 2007; Aslam, 2008; Jitpiromsri, 2009).

In 2004, PM Thaksin dismissed the gun-robbing incident on January fourth; armed robber was blamed as ordinary robbers. Additionally, the government had a mistake in abolishment of Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC) and Mixed Commanding Unit between Civilians, Police and Military Officials number 43(CPM) (McCargo, 2006; Pathmanand, 2006). After this event the violence in southern Thailand had been likely to escalate. It is generally believed that the government lack of understanding the key aspects of the South. Consequently, the government act likes a power vacuum and no responsibility for this situation.

The cause of problem relies on both deteriorating relationship between the state and the local people and distrust of Thai Buddhists and Thai Malay (McCargo, 2009). Geographical location also was probably one of the main factors of conflict (Askew, 2009). Southern province is in the distant from the capital city, so it is difficult to get the correct information from state and different culture. In the meantime, this region is very similar to the neighboring country in terms of social, cultural and religious aspects, therefore it will almost certainly has close relationship with Malay people than Thai people. A trouble of violence in the South of Thailand is very complex and requires great sensitivity to address a conflict. It is the problem of social psychology that is different from other regions. Furthermore, it seems that the government has not been able to completely solve until now. The violence in southern Thailand is ongoing; this is an urgently national problem for the government to solve this situation immediately.

Political history of Pattani might be called as “discrepancy of perspectives” or two sides of the same coin because it depend on the affect of perceptions between Thai state and Pattani (Boonnang , 2003). On one hand, people in the center perceive Pattani’s history as a rebellion region and suppression of Thai state. On the other hand, people in Pattani firmly believed that this area is the right region to fight for freedom and counter the state officials.

As mentioned above, the political history of Pattani was used as a political tool for benefits of both sides. Separatist groups use the political history in order to get Pattani’s independence (Ber Jihad di Pattani), while the history of Pattani evidence was suppressed by the state. The perspective of state, Pattani is a part of the Thai

province and these was showed the stability of Thai government. Accordingly, it is the right thing to suppress the historical Pattani as it is an accepted notion of nation building to use public awareness of Thai people.

The southern unrest violence in Thailand had been ongoing since there are no a compromise agreement with differential viewpoint of historical Pattani. As a consequence, political history of Pattani has to be rewritten under a written agreement that is acceptable for the majority of people in this community. In order to rewriting a new version of history, the government should set up a national committee that consist mainly of state officials, academicians from Thai and Malay Muslims and people in this area. The important thing to note that local people should participate fully in this event, such as giving the historical background in the past. Because of this, it could implant a positive thinking of the most resident in local area and a new history is likely to be accepting widely. In addition, the advantage of this agreement might not be only making a historical balance but also representing national unity of Thailand. It is hoped that Malay Muslims will perceive the southern border provinces as a part of Thailand and also proud of and love the whole of Thailand as the owner. Eventually, all of Thai citizen with different races, ethnic and religion can live in peace.

REFERENCES

- Al-Fatani, A.F. (1994). *Pengantar sejarah Patani*. Alor Setar: Pustaka Darussalam.
- Askew, M. (2007). Thailand's recalcitrant southern borderland: Insurgency, conspiracies and the disorderly state. *Asian Security*. 3(2), 99-120.
- Askew, M. (2009). Landscapes of fear, horizons of trust: Villagers dealing with danger in Thailand's insurgent south. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. 40(1), 59-86.
- Aslam, M.M. (2008). The southern Thailand insurgency: Ideological and identity challenges. *Jati Journal*. 13, 79-93.
- Boonnang P. (2003). *Government's Policy on Thai Muslim in the Southern Border Provinces (A.D. 1932-1973)*. Faculty of Arts, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Burutphat, K. (1976). *Thai Muslim*. Bangkok: Pharepittaya.
- Croissant, A. (2007). Muslim insurgency, political violence, and democracy in Thailand. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. 19, 1-18.
- Dorairajoo, S.D. (2004). Violence in the south of Thailand. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. 5. 465- 471.
- Fraser, F. (1966). *Rusembilan: A Malay Fishing Village in Southern Thailand*. Ithaca: Cornell, University press.

- Gurr, T.R. (2000). *People versus states: Minorities at risk in the new century*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace.
- Horowitz, D. (2001). *The deadly ethnic riot*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Horstmann, A. (2008). Approaching peace in Patani, Southern Thailand some anthropological considerations. *Asia Europe Journal*. 6(1), 57-67.
- Jitpiromsri, S. (2009, January). *Forum Brain Solutions Network in the Southern of Thailand*. Pattani.
- Jory, P. (2007). From Melayu Patani to Thai Muslim The spectre of ethnic identity in southern Thailand. *South East Asia Research*. 15(2), 255-279.
- Khunthongpet, C. (2005). *Haji Sulong bin Abdul Kadir: Rebel or hero of the four southern provinces*. Bangkok: Mathichon Press.
- McCargo, D. (2006). Thaksin and resurgence of violence in the Thai south network monarchy struck back? *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. 38(1), 39-71.
- McCargo, D. (2009). The Politics of Buddhist identity in Thailand's deep south: The demise of civil religion? *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. 40(1), 11-32.
- Nakmaung, K. (1995). *National integration in five southern border*. Thematic of Master degree Department of Administration: Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, Bangkok.
- Pathmanand, U. (2006). Thaksin's Achilles' Heel The Failure of Hawkish Approaches in the Thai South. *Critical Asian Studies*. 38(1), 73-93.
- Phanomyong, P. (1974). *National Unity and the Problems of the Three Southern Provinces*. Bangkok: National Federation of Southern Students.
- Pitiyanuwat, S. (2005). *Civic education in Thailand: Policies and practices in schools* (1st ed.). Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Pitsuwan, S. (1985). *Islam and Malay nationalism: A case study of the Malay-Muslims of Southern Thailand*. Thammasat University (Bangkok): Thai Khadi Research Institute.
- Rahimmula, C. (2004). Peace resolution: A case study of separatist and terrorist movements in Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. *Songklanakarin Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 10(1), 98-112.
- Salae, R. (2004). *Patani Darussalam to Pattani Province, Yala Province and Narathiwat Province: History (Secret) in three Border Provinces of Thailand*. Bangkok.

- Toft, M.D. (2003). *The geography of ethnic violence: Identity interests and the indivisibility of territory*. Princeton: Princeton University.
- Vella, W. F. (1976). *Chaiyo! The role of King Vajiravudh in the development of Thai nationalism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- von Feigenblatt, O. F. (2009). The Thai ethnocracy unravels: A critical cultural analysis of Thailand's socio-political unrest. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 1(3), 583-611.
- Wongted, S. (2004). *Pattani State in Srivijaya older than the state of Sukhothai in history*. Bangkok: Mathichon.